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3rd Prize
Alberta Playwrights Contest - 1945

MORNING GLORY

by

Maxine Sutherland

Morning Glory was awarded third prize in the 1945 Playwriting Competition sponsored by the Alberta Folklore and Local History Project.

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A drama, based on a current Alberta legend.

This legend is, as yet, rather elusive and indefinite but it persists. It is this.

Before the old houses were moved away, those from the surrounding territory often used to go to Berry Creek coal mine. They would camp over night in some of these houses. Although I never heard any particular story, it seems that things were seen and heard that were not ordinary. One house had a cradle in it which rocked in the wind or .....

To add to this, a road gang, working there, declared that they often heard music which no one could explain.

TIME: A summer evening, after midnight.

PLACE: A section of the Berry Creek area of Southeastern Alberta, now used as a Government, Community pasture.

SETTING: A room in a deserted house there.

The room of a vacant prairie house stands open to the wind and weather. There is a door U.C., a window U.L. and a door U.R. in the R. wall, not the back wall as are the other two openings. There is no door hung on either of the doors nor any glass frames in the window. Remnants of old wall paper hang from the walls. Some old streamers of blinds are in the window hole. A cradle stands between R.C. and D.R. There is a pile of blankets D.L.

There is a strong wind blowing at the commencement but dies down as the play makes way, and altogether at last.

CHARACTERS:

JACK PERKINS	- a matter of fact member of an oil drilling crew.
MORRIS LANE	- a more impressionable member of the same crew.
JIM RIDLEY	- the herder of the Berry Creek pasture.
THE GHOST OF MARY HOWES	- the woman who used to live in the house.
THE GHOST OF JOHN HOWES	- the man who lived in the house.

PROPERTIES: Lantern, car pump, gas can, blankets (at least three), cradle, wrench, screw driver, carburetor, a form to represent a baby, a shawl for the baby form, a fan to produce wind off stage.

SOUND EFFECTS: (offstage) The whistling of a strong wind at first but dying down and out as the play gets on - music to go with the opening and closing pantomime (this is optional)

BACK DROP: A prairie morning sky with little rolling hills and wheat field in the fore-ground.

LIGHTING: From complete darkness to the morning sun for back of openings and only the lantern on stage until the morning scene.

As the curtain rises a strong wind, blowing through the door and window openings, rattles the tatters of papers and the old streamers of blinds. The only source of light is the dimly burning lantern beside Jim Ridley, who is sleeping on the pile of blankets D.L. Behind the openings is the blackness of night.

The wind streams the hair and clothes of the figure of a woman who enters the door U.R. but the lighting is such that she seems to emerge from the shadows of the room rather than from the door.

This is the ghost of Mary Howes. She is dressed in white or light clothes and has rather long hair. She bends slowly to the cradle, as though lovingly tucking in a child, straightens and stands in the wind rocking the cradle back and forth.

The sleeper stirs in his sleep but the ghost is not disturbed until the sound of men's voices is heard from without. As they enter she glides back into the corner and out U.R. door.

N.B.
(from the curtain rise to the ghost's exit should be a full minute)

MORRIS LANE: Appears from the darkness at the door U.C. carrying a car pump and a gas can. He is dressed in the Khaki drill pants and shirt usually worn by the men of the oil crews. He is about twenty-five years of age and is of an impressionable nature. As he enters he looks around as though the place were new to him and speaks back to Jack Perkins
There's a light here alright ... a lantern .... he steps to the lantern and look there ... points to the sleeper, Jim Ridley.

JACK PERKINS: Jack Perkins is dressed similarly to Morris Lane but he is older and of a more "seeing is believing nature". He has been paying more attention to putting down the wrench, screw driver and carburetor than to the surroundings and at Morris' last speech walks to him from center stage Humph! Kind of an old fellow, eh? Better wake him and tell him he's got company while I start getting the sand out of this carburetor.
he goes back to the tools and carburetor at center

MORRIS LANE: putting down the car pump and the gas can and leaning to shake the sleeper Hey! hey, wake up, wake up!

JIM RIDLEY: mumbles something which neither audience nor Jack can hear

JACK PERKINS: at work on the carburetor from now on What's he saying?

MORRIS LANE: Something about Mary.

JACK PERKINS: Mary? H'm, maybe the old boy's got a harem. Ask him when he wakes up.

MORRIS LANE: still trying to waken the sleeper Come on, wake up ... wake up ..... as he falls back again on the blankets
He's really sound asleep!

JACK PERKINS: Let him sleep then and bring over that lantern so I can see here. is looking at some of the parts No wonder the truck quit running. Look there, plugged with sand!
as they fix at the carburetor the wind is still blowing but not so hard and there is the sound of the cradle rocking

MORRIS LANE: What's that sound?

JACK PERKINS: What sound?

MORRIS LANE: Listen.
They both listen and the rocking sound continues. Jack holds the lantern up to search the room and they both see that the cradle is rocking back and forth

JACK PERKINS: I'll be dog-goned, a cradle! Must be the wind moving it.

MORRIS LANE: I don't think it is the wind.

JACK PERKINS: No? I do. But if you think it's something else think away, but in the meantime hand me that pump.

MORRIS LANE: hands him the pump and turns again to the rocking cradle as Jack pumps into some of the parts of the carburetor
What is making that thing rock?

JACK PERKINS: I couldn't say. Wake up what's-his-name and ask him.

JIM RIDLEY: has wakened while the men are busy at the center with the cradle and the carburetor business - Jim Ridley is over fifty. He has the talkativeness of people who live alone but somewhat starved for company.
Ridley's the name, Jim Ridley.

Both men, who have had their backs to him, start and turn at the sound of the voice

JACK PERKINS: recovering Hello there.

JIM RIDLEY: I was sound asleep I guess.

JACK PERKINS: I'll say you were.

JIM RIDLEY: You boys belong to the oil crews?

JACK PERKINS: That's us. Jack Perkins's my name and .... Indicating Morris Morris Lane

JIM RIDLEY: Glad to know you boys. What happened, car trouble?

JACK PERKINS: Carburetor plugged in that dust storm, then our lights went out. We been on the prairie out there for hours.

JIM RIDLEY: I often see the trucks go through the gate about six every night

MORRIS LANE: You live up at the gate there?

JIM RIDLEY: Yes, I'm the government herder for this pasture. Stay down in this old shack once in awhile because it's handy to the big corral where I count the stock. Got a bunch in there now. Have to kind of keep a watch on them.

JACK PERKINS: We never knew we were stopped close to a building. We were lost in that dust storm and wandering all over hills and holes until the carburetor plugged and the lights went out.

MORRIS LANE: Then I thought I saw a light about here but it disappeared.

JIM RIDLEY: That about two hours ago?

MORRIS LANE: Yes, it was twelve o'clock. I remember looking at my watch and wondering how long till daylight.

JIM RIDLEY: That's just when I came in from the corral to get some more oil in the lantern. I went right out again.

MORRIS LANE: That's why the light disappeared. to Jack See there, I did see a light after all.

JACK PERKINS: Well your always seeing things no one else sees. Anyway neither of us knew there was a house here. to Jim This must be about the only house in the pasture?

JIM RIDLEY: That's right. Used to be lots of houses before the loan companies sold them and they got hauled away.

MORRIS LANE: Why did they leave this one?

JIM RIDLEY: I bought it.

JACK PERKINS: On account of it being handy to your corral.

JIM RIDLEY: Well, yes, that and other reasons. I knew the folks who lived here.

JACK PERKINS: Can't understand people living on this part of the prairie.

MORRIS LANE: Especially after to-night.

JIM RIDLEY: You mean the dust? It's nothing like it used to be when this was all under cultivation. Dust and drought finally drove the people out.

MORRIS LANE: Why did they stay as long as they did?

JIM RIDLEY: The gamble there was in making a fortune in wheat got most of them. You get to like the prairie too, after you live on her awhile.

JACK PERKINS: Never for me. Gophers and badger holes and dust! Uh-uh. Every darn little hill looking like the next ..... to Morris What time is it?

MORRIS LANE: Half-past two.

JACK PERKINS: Good, now all we got to do is wait awhile for the day to come and we're away.

MORRIS LANE: All cleaned out?

JACK PERKINS: As soon as I pour some gas over this part.

MORRIS LANE: hands him the gas can

JIM RIDLEY: You boys ever seen the sun-up over the prairie?

MORRIS LANE: Not to pay much attention to it, usually in bed or in a hurry to get there at that time.

Jack is at the carburetor with the gas.

JIM RIDLEY: Sometimes it's much but at other times it's beautiful. It's really worthwhile then to see. Seems like all the ugly things are hidden in the soft lights coming in like slow music over the little hills.
That's when the prairie whispers her promises to the Men who live upon her ... promises of green and golden fields of wheat .... It's there beneath the spreading gold light of the rising sun that every prairie farmer sees the wheat field of his dreams.

MORRIS LANE: Gosh, you must like the place to talk like that!

JACK PERKINS: setting down the carburetor beside the can She's done at last.

JIM RIDLEY: throwing out a blanket to each May as well take it easy while you wait.

During the last part of Jim's speech about the wheat the cradle has started to rock slowly. There is no wind now.

JACK PERKINS: as he sits There goes that cradle again. It gives me the willies rocking like that. to Jim What the devil does rock the thing?

JIM RIDLEY: I'm not sure if you'll agree with my answer but it's a -- well .. a ghost ....

MORRIS LANE: Whose ghost?

JIM RIDLEY: The ghost of Mary Howes.

MORRIS LANE: That's the name you mentioned in your sleep.

JIM RIDLEY: I saw her there, to-night, rocking the cradle.

JACK PERKINS: You mean you dreamed you saw her there?

JIM RIDLEY: It was too real to be a dream

the cradle continues

JACK PERKINS: takes up lantern and goes to the rocking cradle I'll soon see what's there. as he moves to it, it stops rocking; he examines around it with the light and goes to the door U.R. and holds the light in there
Can't see a thing could make it rock.
Comes back to his seat on blanket

MORRIS LANE: Who was Mary Howes?

JIM RIDLEY: Mary was the wife of John Howes. They used to live in this house. Their baby died in that cradle.

JACK PERKINS: My friend, you live too much alone!

MORRIS LANE: And John and Mary, what of them?

JIM RIDLEY: They both had faith in the promise of spring. Mary's faith outlasted John's. Each year she planted morning glories in the dry earth bed under the window there, and hope in the heart of John. For five years they lost everything to the wind and the drought.

MORRIS LANE: Must have been hard for the women.

JIM RIDLEY: It was. With the loss of the baby the light of knowing went from the face of Mary. They buried the kid in the dry earth bed where a wind twisted morning glory had but one poor bloom, and in the days which followed the winds blew, mounting the madness in the brain of Mary. I begged John to let me have the mountie come to take her away. He wouldn't answer me at all but sat there, looking at the rifle that hung above the door. To and fro there, she'd rock the cradle as though the baby was in it. Then she'd lean and find it gone and beat with her fists on John and plead with him to find her child. I saw her at the window too, caressing the one bloom of the wind twisted morning glory. Next day I brought the mountie. We found them both, beyond the madness and the wind. Mary had fallen there, across the cradle. The one bloom of the wind twisted morning glory vine was in her hand. John fell by the door, the rifle by his hand.

JACK PERKINS: Suicide, eh?

JIM RIDLEY: That's what they called it. I always think it was a mercy.

MORRIS LANE: They never knew the fulfillment of a harvest?

JIM RIDLEY: Not while they lived but in the spring which followed the rains returned. The dormant seeds grew up in John's wheat field and in the morning glory bed the vines arose and filled the window with their bloom.
I always think that in the summer dawns I see the figure of a man walk from the wheat field to the house door here and then the figure of a woman with a child in arms walks out to meet him and as music rolls across the little hills thoy walk together to the dawn.

JACK PERKINS: shaking head You live too much alone.

Morris is impressed and says nothing

JACK PERKINS: looking to the openings where the light of day is commencing to show There comes the daylight at last.
to Morris Come on, let's go it's light enough.

MORRIS LANE: rousing I'd like to stay and watch it come.

JACK PERKINS: Say! You really don't believe that ghost story do you?

MORRIS LANE: I think I understand it.

JIM RIDLEY: I believe you do. Each year I plant and plough the wheat field where they walk .....

MORRIS LANE: Look! Look there.

He points to the corner where the figure of a woman is moving slowly towards the cradle. As the three men watch, in the growing light in the sky, she takes a baby from the cradle and goes with it to the door to join the ghost of John. The full glory of the morning sun lights up the prairie back drop as they walk out, and into it.

CURTAIN

Morning Glory may be produced royalty free in the Province of Alberta until June 30, 1947. The royalty on each performance outside the Province of Alberta is $3.00.

by

Maxine E.Sutherland.

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Address after July I,1945....Lanfine,Alberta.

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To Whom It May Concern:

This play is my own work and hitherto unproduced and unpublished.

Maxine E. Sutherland